NEWS

# Winchester Town Meeting completes fall session with conservation, housing votes

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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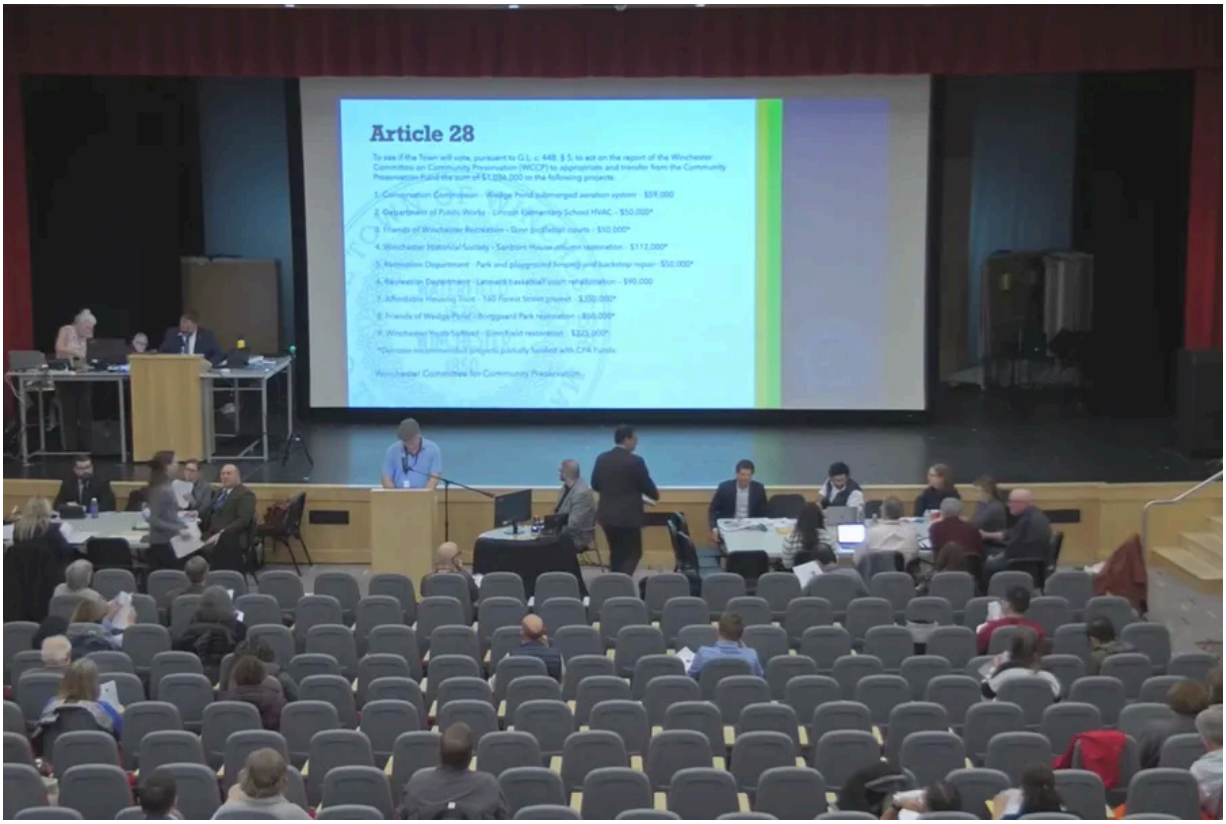


Town Meeting members review Article 28, a package of Community Preservation Act projects totaling just over $1 million, during the final night of Winchester's fall session Nov. 10 at Winchester High School. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM/WILL DOWD

Town Meeting members voted to indefinitely postpone a propos town to purchase 13.4 acres off Forest Circle for conservation purposes

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during the final night of their fall session Nov. 10, ending a three-night gathering that also saw approval of affordable housing funding and multiple labor contracts.

Article 35 would have authorized the town to acquire the Forest Circle property for open space at a cost of up to $3 million, combining as much as $1.5 million in borrowing with up to $1.5 million in Community Preservation Act funds. After a brief procedural motion, Town Meeting voted to indefinitely postpone the article without debate.

The postponement came on a night when Town Meeting approved $350,000 in Community Preservation Act funds toward renovating a town-owned house at 160 Forest St. for affordable housing, along with eight other CPA-funded projects totaling just over $1 million.

The 160 Forest St. project generated significant debate before Town Meeting approved related articles.

The Winchester Affordable Housing Trust plans to renovate the single-family home, which was bequeathed to the town by former resident Marsha Chase Rice with the stipulation it be used for affordable housing.

The property carries a deed restriction requiring it remain affordable in perpetuity for households earning below 80% of area median income.

Under Article 28, Town Meeting appropriated $350,000 in CPA housing funds toward the renovation budget.

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The Affordable Housing Trust will now take on the estimated $600,000 renovation of 160 Forest St.
WINCHESTER NEWS FILE PHOTO

A related Article 29 transferring care, custody, control and ownership of the property from the town to the Affordable Housing Trust passed 119-23, with five abstentions, after extended discussion on project costs and long-term control.

The trust has budgeted $600,000 for the work, with up to $250,000 coming from its own funds in addition to the CPA allocation.

Town Meeting also approved three collective bargaining agreements covering Department of Public Works employees, custodians and clerical workers. The DPW contract includes cost-of-living adjustments of 2.25% in fiscal 2026, 2.5% in fiscal 2027 and 2.75% in fiscal 2028, along with an increase in snow removal incentive pay of $125 per year, bringing the total to $500 for eligible workers.

Custodians received similar COLA increases and a new $250 ann
removal incentive for staff who help clear school properties in winter.

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Clerical workers accepted a 1% raise for fiscal 2026 but gained an additional step on their pay scale, providing a 3% increase for employees at the top of the range when they move to the new highest step. The contracts required $158,720 in transfers from various accounts to fund retroactive wage increases.

In other CPA funding decisions, Town Meeting approved $59,000 for a submerged aeration system at Wedge Pond; $50,000 toward HVAC system replacement and a new chiller at Lincoln Elementary School; $112,000 for column restoration at the Sanborn House, contingent on matching state funds; $50,000 for design and engineering of pickleball courts at Ginn Field; $50,000 for fence and backstop repairs at various parks; $90,000 for Leonard Field basketball court restoration; $50,000 toward restoration and improvements at Borggaard Park/Beach; and $225,000 for irrigation and sod replacement at Ginn Field.

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The pickleball court design proposal passed 120-31, with one abstention, after debate about noise, parking and whether the space currently used as a basketball court should remain available for that purpose.

Town Meeting unanimously approved tax relief measures for veterans and seniors. For disabled veterans, the annual property tax exemption doubles from $400 to $800, with future increases indexed to the consumer price index under Articles 31 and 32. The income eligibility limit for senior property tax deferrals increased from $60,000 to $72,000 for individuals and to $109,000 for couples, also indexed to inflation going forward.

Members approved $150,000 for Geographic Information System consulting and training for school and planning department staff. The funding will enable town employees to use existing GIS software

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enrollment planning, facility management and development analysis rather than hiring outside consultants for each project.

The School Committee's plan to transfer the former Mystic School building to general town control passed unanimously.

The Mystic School has been transferred from the School Committee to the town. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

The building, which closed as a school in 1983, currently houses the Recreation Department and the Kids Corner childcare program.

The transfer allows the town to make long-term plans for the property while providing more stability for existing tenants.

Town Meeting also created two new positions: a Community Preservation Act administrator and a deputy town manager. The CPA adminis

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help manage the town's new preservation program, while the deputy town

manager role will be filled by the next town manager after the current search concludes.

Earlier in the evening, members heard an informational report on expanding solar installations on town property, including potential sites on the Winchester High School gym roof, parking canopies and additional panels at the Department of Public Works facility.

The town expects to realize about $50,000 in net annual revenue from its solar installations, with the Lynch Elementary School array alone projected to save $750,000 over 25 years. Because the solar article carried no appropriation, it was indefinitely postponed after the presentation.

The session concluded at about 10:25 p.m., after Town Meeting had taken action on all 37 warrant articles over three nights, including the Forest Circle purchase, which members chose to set aside for now by indefinitely postponing Article 35.

*Will Dowd is a Massachusetts journalist who covers municipal government and community life for Winchester News. He previously co-founded the Marblehead Current and now runs The Marblehead Independent, a reader-funded digital newsroom.*

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The Winchester Select Board on Feb. 23 approved an overnight parking pilot, raised building permit fees for the first time since 2021, adopted the 2026 outdoor dining policy and directed the town manager to examine reinvesting downtown-generated revenue into town center improvements. The board voted unanimously to implement the overnight

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By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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